



State Representative

33rd District

Shay Schual-Berke, M.D.



Looking Ahead to 2008

November 2007

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Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe that 2008 is already around the corner. That means in a couple of months, state lawmakers will return to Olympia for a new, 60-day legislative session. Compared to the 105-day session earlier this year you might think a shorter session would be much more manageable, but the opposite is true.

Way back when, these short sessions were intended to provide just enough time for lawmakers to make minor tweaks to the state budget, pick up on legislative issues from the past session, and maybe introduce a few new bills. But in recent years, these short sessions have become more intense as lawmakers introduce significant budget and policy initiatives.

This year may be different. When it comes to the budget, concerns over sustainability, the housing downturn, and our understanding that paying for the programs and services currently on the books means there won't be a lot left over. I think it's time we talk more about returning to what short sessions used to be, and not open up too many major issue areas or spending items.

In addition, this will be an unusual session because we are coming up on a presidential and gubernatorial election year. Questions about what the federal government will decide on a range of issues such as health care and education will affect our policy on the state level. It's difficult to plan for the long-term when you can't predict federal policy changes.

So as I prepare for the 2008 session, I'm once again asking for your feedback. You'll find bolded questions throughout this letter and I'd love for you to get in touch and let me know what you think.

And don't forget – until we return to Olympia, my Des Moines office remains open and I encourage you to call or drop by if you have ideas or questions. We're always happy to hear from you!

Warmly,

Shay

Representative Shay Schual-Berke, M.D. • 33rd Legislative District

2008 LEGISLATIVE CALENDAR – DATES OF SIGNIFICANCE

January 14	First day of session
February 8	Committee cut-off. This is the last day that most bills can be introduced and read in a committee (with the exception of fiscal committees). If a bill doesn't get read in committee, it is considered "dead" for the session.
February 19	Last day to consider bills in house of origin. All House bills must be passed out of the House and all Senate bills must be passed out of the Senate.
February 29	Committee cut-off for bills coming from the opposite house of origin.
March 7	Last day to consider most bills from opposite house of origin. Bills with amendments and changes, initiatives, and others are still in play.
March 13	"Sine die" or the last day of the session.

WHAT'S THE PLAN FOR 2008? A FEW OF MY PREDICTIONS

EDUCATION WILL CONTINUE TO DOMINATE

Education dominated most of the 2007 legislative session. From passing my legislation, HJR 4204, that gives voters a say on simple majority for school levies to debating changes to the WASL, education was front and center on lawmakers' agendas.

But there were many issues left unresolved, including changing the way we fund education. For 30 years, we've used an outdated funding formula to determine how much state funding school districts receive. Times have changed and so have the kinds of costs schools are trying to cover (e.g., higher technology costs and increasing transportation costs). The time to revamp the funding formula is long past due and I think 2008 might be the year we finally make progress on this issue.

In addition, recent WASL results confirm that a significant education gap exists among lower-income students or students of color and more affluent students. Lawmakers will continue to discuss how to eliminate this gap so that all students are given an equal chance to succeed in school.



Congratulations to the staff and students of Mount Rainier High School! It's one of only six schools statewide this year that have had such academic improvement that it is no longer on the federal improvement list.



HEALTH CARE WILL BE A MAJOR ISSUE AT BOTH THE NATIONAL AND STATE LEVEL

As the 2008 presidential elections near, health care will likely become one of the most talked-about domestic issues. And that means a fresh spotlight will be placed onto what states are doing to address the issues of quality, access and affordability.

Last session we made tremendous strides to cover more kids, provide parity for mental health services, help low-income seniors hurt by Medicare Part D requirements, and create a health insurance partnership between employers, employees and the state to help cover more workers.

But until a national solution is found, there is much more work to do at the state level. Ideas on the table for this session include refining the new health insurance partnership, and covering more kids by helping low-income 19-year-olds who "age out" of Medicaid or the state children's health insurance plan.

? In the health care survey I posted online recently, many of you shared that you obtain your insurance through your employer but are worried about rising costs or losing coverage if you switch jobs. Do you think we should continue to push for a stronger employer-based system or is it time to push for a more individual-based system?

TRANSPORTATION CHOICES WILL NEED TO BE MADE

It's no secret that the Puget Sound region is in desperate need of several major transportation fixes including a new Viaduct and SR 520 bridge and improvements to I-405 and SR-167. There is also increasing demand for transit solutions that help workers battle longer and longer commute times. We must come to terms with the impacts of building new roads versus the utility of mass transit.

At the time of writing this newsletter, the debate about the November ballot proposal for a regional roads-and-transit funding package is well-underway. Regardless of the outcome of the election, legislators will need to make tough decisions about how to proceed with a whole slate of transit and road projects. Lower-than-expected gas tax revenues and increasing project costs present us with clear challenges about determining which projects should receive the highest priority.

? Now that the vote is in on the road and transit package, what would you recommend the legislature do?





A PERSONAL PRIORITY - IMPROVING FOSTER CARE FOR WASHINGTON’S CHILDREN

A recent survey of foster care providers in our state revealed a sobering snapshot of how well we care for foster children. The survey, which was intended to track improvements in our system following a 2004 lawsuit known as the Jessica Braam case, revealed that only 38 percent of foster care households receive monthly visits by a caseworker. Just as troubling was the fact that more than 900 foster care households could not be reached for the survey because the state didn’t have a current phone number on file.

Even more recently was the tragic story of a young woman who was found to have suffered years of extensive abuse by her foster mother despite repeated complaints from school counselors and other adults.

It’s an unacceptable failure on our part to let so many children fall through the cracks.

Currently, the state Department of Social and Health Services is responsible for overseeing foster care programs. Given the two years they’ve had to reform their system since the Braam case, I do not believe DSHS is doing an adequate job of moving quickly on reforms.

That’s why I intend to introduce legislation to provide enhanced focus of effort, vision and accountability in how state agencies care for foster children. Care for these children should be led by a cabinet-level director which could ensure greater accountability and provide leverage for the legislative and budgetary resources needed to properly care for our state’s most vulnerable children.

? It’s almost certain that efforts to significantly change how we manage foster care will be met with resistance and skepticism. Do you agree that such an effort is needed? Do you have ideas for changes we should make?



HEALTH CARE IN WASHINGTON: RESULTS OF RECENT SURVEY

Did you know...

- 593,000 Washingtonians have no insurance?
- The number of uninsured Americans has been rising over the past six years to a record high of 47 million in 2006?
- The income group with the most people losing insurance was households making \$75,000 or more a year, showing that the issue is not limited to the poor?

As a retired doctor, health care is an important issue to me. It’s also an issue that hits us all in a very personal way. That’s why I posted a survey on my website recently asking you to share your stories and your ideas about ways we can address this issue.

We had a tremendous response and I sincerely thank everyone who shared their story and their opinions. Your responses were candid and reflected a full range of opinions and ideas.

Here are a few highlights from the survey. **A more detailed summary is posted on my website at www.housedemocrats.wa.gov/members/schual-berke.**

- Eighty-four percent of you stated that health care is the “most important” or a “very important” issue when compared to other issues facing the state.
- Thirty-six percent of you believe that Washington should invest in making sure everyone has health coverage. Fifteen percent believe just the opposite – that health care is not the state’s job and we should not provide subsidies to help cover anyone.
- Support was surprisingly strong for using tax incentives to help people purchase insurance and for employers who offer health insurance to their workers.
- Eighty-one percent of respondents think all Washingtonians should have some sort of coverage. Interestingly, most people feel that health care coverage should primarily protect individuals and families from extraordinary and unforeseeable times, not just to pay their everyday health care costs.
- Most people expect insurance to cover preventive care, emergency room services and hospital stays. Again, this suggests that people are primarily wanting protection from catastrophe but are also seeking the ability to prevent illness.

Some of the responses were predictable but there were some surprises as well. The strong support for tax incentives was particularly interesting and will certainly color the way I look at such proposals in the legislature.

Thank you again to all who shared your thoughts. Please drop me a line if you’d like to weigh in on these issues.

HEALTH CARE IN WASHINGTON - A FEW SURVEY RESPONSES FROM YOU

“Recently I’ve seen patients who went without health insurance until they became 65. By the time they could afford medical care, they had colon cancers that should have been detected earlier, strokes from untreated hypertension, and renal disease, and untreated coronary artery disease.”

“Health care coverage is the major reason I work. I have several years until I reach Medicare age and dread the cost of an individual plan.”

“Both my spouse and I presently have insurance through our employers. I’m happy with my insurance. I haven’t lost my insurance recently but making sure I keep it is of the utmost importance to me. It is a huge consideration when I look at changing employers.”